

All About Pets

The national pet care information service



BASIC HEALTH CARE FOR YOUR CAT



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

Simple measures such as checking for ear discharge, attending to tooth care and feeling for external lumps are an important part of routine cat care.

Daily grooming is also important for longhaired cats to avoid matting but is beneficial to all cats and provides an opportunity to examine your pet. Start by doing a little at a time and include areas such as the belly, under the tail and around the back legs. Talk to your vet about other important health care measures for your pet.





Why you should neuter your cat

Female cats come 'on heat' at least every three weeks – they are restless, miaow loudly and roll around, appearing as if in pain. Drugs to suppress heat are available but there is a risk of side effects. Recurrent heats may distress your pet and for this reason alone, spaying (which stops them) is desirable. In addition, it prevents womb infections later on in life and reduces the risk of breast cancer. A cat does not need to have a litter first. The operation is best done at around five to six months of age, although it can safely be done younger or older and can also be performed on cats in the first few weeks of pregnancy.

Male cats should also be neutered at five to six months. Otherwise they are at risk of contracting the cat form of AIDS (FIV) from fighting and are more likely to spray, including in the house (tom cat urine has a strong smell) and behave aggressively.

In both cases the operation is straightforward and your pet will usually return home from the clinic the same day. Female cats will have a patch of hair shaved, either on the flank or the belly. Recovery is rapid – usually by the next day, although females may have to wear an Elizabethan collar for a few days to prevent interference with the wound. See your vet if your kitten seems poorly after the operation. In some breeds (for example Siamese) shaved hair may grow back a darker colour, but this returns to normal in time.

Flea treatment

Most cats get fleas at some point. They are common in summer but can be hard to spot as they spend little time on the animal. Even if you have no other pets, fleas can be picked up outside. Routine treatment is recommended, especially for an itchy animal, and is best obtained from the vet as most pet shop and supermarket products, including collars and powders, are less effective. Never use a flea product for dogs on a cat, as they can be poisonous. Your vet may suggest a product that also kills ear mites and some intestinal worms too. Treatment of nursing mothers and young kittens is especially important, as they are vulnerable to serious anaemia from flea bites – ask the vet for a product that is safe for kittens.

As well as your cat, your home and all other pets also need to be treated for fleas. Vacuum the house first as the vibration stimulates the hatching of flea eggs. When treating, pay particular attention to dark crevices, such as down the sides of chair cushions and around skirting boards, as fleas crawl away from light to breed.

All cats should be vaccinated

Vaccination can prevent illness in your pet, but no vaccination can be guaranteed to work in every animal. It doesn't work if the animal is already infected. Cats can be vaccinated against killer diseases such as infectious enteritis and leukaemia and against flu, which is not usually a killer but can be serious (although, as in people, not every strain is covered). Kittens need two injections, usually three to four weeks apart and then annual boosters. Consult the vet as soon as you obtain a new pet. If you don't know if your pet has been vaccinated, it doesn't hurt to repeat the course.





Are there any side effects?

Your cat may get a slight cold or fever following vaccination. Sometimes a lump will appear at the injection site. If this lump persists, or develops at any time in the future consult your vet. Serious allergic reactions to vaccination are extremely rare and happen immediately afterwards.

Internal parasites

Kittens need worming against roundworm every two to four weeks until six months old. Adult cats should be wormed two to four times a year and when they are feeding kittens.

Treatment for tapeworms should be given twice yearly. Some tapeworms – which look like grains of rice in the faeces – are caught from fleas, so flea treatment is also necessary. A single tablet for all worms can be purchased from your vet. With pet shop products, dose for the correct bodyweight and check which worms they control.

Toxoplasma is a microscopic parasite, which lives in the bowel and can be present in cat faeces. Infection cannot be prevented, though discouraging your cat from hunting and not feeding it raw meat can reduce the chance. It can be harmful to pregnant women, but is usually caught from handling or eating raw meat. However, contact with cat faeces should also be avoided.

Further information

For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk, the national pet care information service. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is provided by The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity. We rely entirely on your support to enable us to continue our vital work. Any contribution would be most welcome. Thank you.



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